

CRASC Technical Committee Meeting Minutes
Turners Falls, MA
January 18, 2005

1. Call to Order and Approval of Minutes from the Last Meeting

Mr. Jay McMenemy called the meeting to order at 10:17 a.m. and adjourned at 2:18 p.m. Mr. David MacDuffee, NMFS, was absent from the meeting. The Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries (MDMF) position on the Technical Committee remains vacant.

Mr. Steve Gephard motioned to approve the Minutes from the October 5, 2004 meeting with one amendment to Other Business on page 7: "Leesville fishway was opened to capture any salmon that might return this fall." Mr. John Warner seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved as amended.

2. Fish Culture Subcommittee Update

Mr. Mickey Novak started his presentation with well wishes to both the Hatchery Manager and the Assistant Hatchery Manager at the Sunderland SFH. Both are recovering from injuries as a result of an automobile accident during work last week.

A copy of the article *Desperate Times Call for Desperate Measures: Mactaquac Fish Hatchery Program Revamped* by Quentin Dodd from Hatchery International (November/December 2004) was provided to the Technical Committee. The article outlines the recovery approach taken on the St. Johns River.

Mr. Novak summarized program egg production for the 2004 season. A total of 12.52M eggs were produced: including 280K sea-run eggs, 11.75M domestic eggs and 489K kelts eggs. Production was reduced in several instances through discard, egg burial, and pre-spawn stocking as a result of limitations initially imposed, and later relaxed, at the White River NFH.

The term position filled by Darren Desmarais at the Richard Cronin NSS will be extended until the end of September 2005.

Mr. Novak summarized production activities at the Richard Cronin NSS. Control fish at the station tested positive for furunculosis this year. Water samples from production pools were all clean except for one sample. An assessment by the Lamar Fish Health Unit indicated that the sample was contaminated and they concluded that this result should not preclude transfer of sea runs as kelts to the North Attleboro NFH. However, the Regional Office has not yet approved the transfer so the sea-run kelts are still being held at the RCNSS. The two-month delay in this decision has delayed reconditioning of the kelts which will likely impact egg production. As a consequence, staff at the RCNSS has initiated kelt feeding for a dozen kelts so far. Mr. Novak indicated that he was using volunteers to recondition the kelts and that he expected this additional responsibility to

cost about \$1,000 in fish feed if the fish remain on station. The Technical Committee acknowledged the value of these kelts for egg production. They agreed that kelt reconditioning at the North Attleboro NFH was preferred and to recommend that the USFWS fully support kelt production needs including staff, feed, hormones and therapeutants there or at RCNSS if the kelts remain on station. They also recommend, if these kelts remain on station, that the RCNSS discard remaining kelt and domestic display fish in Tank 1 along with any leftover mature parr that are currently inside the building to save space and expense and to provide room for these kelts.

The White River NFH has been authorized to hire two seasonals this winter and one this spring to assist with egg management and fry production. Staff from the Richard Cronin NSS is assisting with egg care there this week. Mr. Steve Roy reported that the USFS had agreed and has taken action to provide \$15,000 to assist with seasonal hires at the WRNFH with additional funding available (up to a total of \$32,000) contingent on production levels.

The Pittsford NFH normally incubates and hatches pre-smolts on station. This year, the eggs have remained at the WRNFH apparently because of the ongoing funding concern and the possibility that the year-class would be lost if moved to PNFH. The Technical Committee agreed that smolt production is important to the program. They agreed to recommend that the WRNFH separate out an appropriate number of eggs for smolt production. Further, they recommend that production should be initiated at PNFH as planned. It was considered that 0+ parr were more valuable to the program if produced at PNFH should a premature release be required by budget concerns.

Smolt stocking will be implemented in spring much like last year. The CTDEP, MDFW and NHFG will haul the smolts in equal numbers to one of two sites: the Farmington River site in CT or the mainstem Connecticut River site in Hadley, MA. The stocking will take place the last week of March with any extra days required the first week of April. Mr. Gephard agreed to draft a schedule in consultation with Mr. Steve Jackson.

The CTDEP provided assistance to the program through Mr. Joe Ravita in 2004. Mr. Ravita transferred sea-run salmon from Connecticut fishways to the Richard Cronin NSS, developed the spawning protocol, and assisted with spawning. Absent funding in 2005, it is not expected that Mr. Ravita will assist in hauling sea runs again. The CTDEP upgraded holding conditions at the Leesville dam and Inland Fisheries staff will manage any required transfers. However, it is likely that Mr. Ravita will be made available to help the program again in the fall.

The CTDEP buried eggs in redds at 5,000 eggs per redd, and released 111 pre-spawning domestic brood stock this past fall in response the USFWS incubation limits initially imposed (and then lifted) at the WRNFH. Adults were stocked in the Salmon, Farmington and Eightmile River watersheds. Redd surveys were conducted in November. No redds were observed in the Eightmile River, 17 redds were observed in the Salmon River and 6 redds were seen in the Farmington River. The actual number of redds was likely higher than that reported. Poaching likely occurred though it was not

considered a significant issue. Some further limited evaluation may be possible assuming egg-plant fry emerge later and are smaller than stocked fry.

The NHFG has obtained and is installing surplus chillers from the Nashua NFH at the Warren SFH. This will provide the Warren hatchery with increased flexibility to incubate eggs for the program.

The fry allocation meeting is scheduled for March 9, 2005 at the White River NFH. It was agreed that stocking fry was a top priority so as not to have a negative impact on adult returns. In the absence of the Sunderland FRO, the states have agreed to find a way to get these 'extra' fish stocked. Additionally, Mr. Novak volunteered some assistance from the Richard Cronin NSS and Mr. Alex Haro volunteered some assistance from the USGS-Conte lab. Ms. Janice Rowan observed that the SFRO truck would be available to the States under existing agreements but it was not known if there would be adequate funding available for gas and maintenance of the vehicle.

3. Genetics Subcommittee Update

Mr. Gephard reported that the spawning protocol had resulted in 13 family batches in 2004. Those included in the egg bank were comprised of 100 crosses including 50 females (13 kelt) mated with 21 sea run, 30 mature parr and 3 kelt males, producing a 50:54 female:male sex ratio.

He agreed with Mr. Novak's assessment that the spawning season went well. He noted that the use of hormones is important in capturing all crosses as well as in improving efficiency and effectiveness.

4. Salmon Studies Update

Mr. McMenemy monitored the location of one radio-tagged adult salmon just below the Wells River in Vermont at the end of November. This salmon was not detected by monitors at Wilder or Bellows.

Fall index site assessment estimates should be forwarded to Mr. McMenemy as soon as possible.

5. Fish Passage Subcommittee Update

Mr. Warner provided the following update on fish passage and hydro issues:

Holyoke Fish Passage -

- Upstream lift modifications on schedule
- Last item will be trap and truck system but should be done by mid-March
- Evaluations of new system will be done this year
- Sturgeon behavior and passage studies ongoing at Conte
- Sturgeon and eel field studies in canal to be done this year

Discussion: Mr. Warner agreed to work with Mr. Slater and HG&E to schedule a tour of the new fish passage facilities at the end of March.

Mr. Haro reported that an experimental eelpass had been in operation on the South Hadley side of the dam from the end of July through mid-October. Few eels were observed likely because of competing flow issues. The traps on the Holyoke side were also pretty unsuccessful due to a lack of attraction water as a consequence of the construction activities. The study will be repeated in 2005 under 'normal' flow circumstances.

Turners Falls Fish Passage –

- Experimental new false entrance below Gatehouse successful in 2004 testing
- Retest in 2005
- Reviewing plan for this and schedule for modifications and studies at Cabot, Gatehouse and Spillway - current targets proposed by NU are new entrance at Gatehouse ready in 2008, and new passage system at Cabot in 2009 – will comment on proposal

Discussion: The 2004 evaluation will be repeated in 2005 with some adjustments. The flume and pump will be lowered one foot to reduce air intake by the pump. A chain link fence will be placed from the entrance of the flume to Spillway to prevent or delay drop-back there. The chutes have been removed, as planned, at Cabot, and modeling is underway to modify the slots. The modeling work is happening at the USGS Conte lab. While the slot modification is not expected to improve overall efficiency greatly because the ladder is so long, the results may have positive application elsewhere at other fishways.

Fiske Mill Dam – Ashuelot River

- Project sold to new owner
- Application to surrender license withdrawn
- Dam removal now looking highly unlikely
- New owner is aware of passage needs and says they are planning on building the approved denil ladder in 2005 or 2006

Discussion: The plan for a Denil fishway at this dam does not include a window for counting (like at DSI) but does include a trap at the upper end.

Westfield Paper/Russell Paper Dam – Westfield River

- Application for exemption filed with the FERC to restart project
- USFWS will require downstream fish passage and bypass flows

Fifteen Mile Falls

- Smolt sampler installed and tested in 2004 – variable success
- Retest of smolt capture device is currently proposed – no details yet

- Approximately \$1Million to be distributed in 2005 to towns, and NGO's from Upper Ct. River Mitigation and Enhancement Fund. Included are funds to move towards removal of the East Burke Dam – E.Br. Passumpsic

USGEN Assets

- USGEN/PGE Generating owned and operated the Deerfield River Project, Fifteen Mile Falls, Wilder, Bellows Falls, and Vernon projects
- USGEN/PGE Generating has been in bankruptcy
- Trans Canada have purchased the projects except Bellows Falls
- Bellows Falls is likely to be owned by the Town of Rockingham, Vermont in a separate transaction
- Will need to see how that affects our dealing with these projects

Discussion: A downstream Deerfield River smolt passage study at the #2 dam was conducted in 2004 but the results have not been made available yet.

6. Shad Studies Subcommittee Update

Mr. Slater noted that fish passage counts at Turners Falls had been completed though he did not yet have the numbers to report.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission is conducting a coast-wide review of shad stocks. They are looking for data beyond fish counts to include age, length, and sex data by year. This is the sort of data collected by Mr. Tom Savoy, CTDEP. The available data was provided by Mr. Slater for the Connecticut River stock. It was unclear whether this assessment would address herring as well. Mr. Gephard indicated support for the process to include herring.

There was some discussion about shad transfers from Holyoke this year. The goal is to transfer 1,000 to the Ashuelot River and 1,000-1,500 to the mainstem above the Vernon dam. The NHFG, CTDEP and USGS are planning to collect fish at the facility for transfers and research. Ms. Rowan again observed that the SFRO trucks would be available but it was not known if there would be adequate funding for gas and maintenance of the vehicles. The newly constructed facility will require some flexibility and on-site coordination by HG&E initially. The agency contact will be Mr. Slater, with Ms. Rowan as the back-up. Details will be further discussed during the site tour in March. Thus, Mr. Novak was relieved of the duty of coordinating shad transfers this year.

Mr. Haro indicated that the USGS-Conte lab would be PIT tagging and releasing 1,000-1,500 shad at Holyoke for the Turners Falls passage study. This will be done in the old trap if possible. A few additional shad (200) will be tagged at Cabot. The lab will be taking 1-2 loads per week. Once the research is completed, these shad will be released in the Turners Falls pool. The lab is also available to assist with shad transfers.

Mr. Gabe Gries reported that the Environmental Advisory Committee planned to ask the Vermont Yankee to take a closer look at shad production, spawning areas etc. The proposal to increase thermal discharge has not been finally resolved yet. Biologists planned to meet this week to discuss the issue. Mr. Gries noted that Vermont is under some pressure to render a decision. Mr. Slater offered the results of a contracted study on the Westfield River that may shed some additional light on shad movement and behavior.

There is a possibility that the USGS Conte lab can handle some additional blueback herring genetic samples. Mr. Gephard and Mr. Slater were encouraged to contact Ms. Kitty Griswold about what might be feasible in the coming season if they are collecting or transferring herring.

There was some discussion about a paper recently published in an AFS Monograph, *The Impact of Enhancement Initiatives on the Structure and Dynamics of the Connecticut River Population of American Shad*, by William Leggett, Thomas Savoy, and Christine Tomichek. It was agreed that the Shad Studies Subcommittee would meet, review the paper and provide a written response to the Technical Committee prior to the returns season.

7. CRASC Accomplishment Report

Ms. Rowan noted that the Coordinator's Office Website update was finally completed with the addition of the Atlantic Salmon Egg Rearing Program workbook. See: <http://www.fws.gov/r5crc/salmon/workbook/index.htm>

8. Other Business

Mr. Slater initiated a discussion on advancing the scientific research that has been identified as important to the program. He suggested that the Technical Committee should be refining the scope of work for these critical projects and then shopping the proposal around to various funding sources.

Mr. Gephard agreed. He indicated that the CTDEP currently had as much as \$500K available through their State SEP (Supplemental Environmental Project) fund source and that Mr. Ed Parker had requested a priority package from CTDEP Inland Fisheries for a proposal to the SEP advisory Committee. From the existing CRASC list, Mr. Gephard suggested the most important projects were the acoustic tracking project and the pound net project. The Technical Committee agreed. Mr. Gephard proposed to develop a funding proposal package for the SEP Committee in time for their February meeting. He also agreed to have a summary of these proposals available in time for the CRASC meeting on Friday.

And,

Both Mr. Tom Miner (retired) and Ms. Whitty Sanford has left the CRWC as of the end of the year (2004). A member of the CRWC Board is serving as the

acting Executive Director while the search for a new Executive Director continues.

The CRASC Research Forum scheduled for February 9, 2005 has almost 70 people registered and 12 papers on the agenda.

The draft eel management plan completion has been delayed again and is now expected in June 2005.

The Coordinator's Office has a UMASS intern, Ms. Alia Hinds, who has agreed to work with the Technical Committee to finalize the sea lamprey management plan. Any comments on the existing draft should be forwarded to Ms. Hinds at hinds@umass.student.edu by February 14, 2005.

The next Technical Committee meeting is scheduled for November 7, 2005.

The U.S. Atlantic Salmon Assessment Committee Meeting scheduled is for week of February 28 in Woods Hole, MA. Comments on the draft narrative should be forwarded to Mr. McMenemy. Any data should be forwarded to Ms. Rowan.

The 'Next Steps for NASCO' meeting is scheduled for January 25, 2005 in Portland, ME.

The Atlantic Salmon Egg Rearing Program Orientation for teachers was held on January 13, 2005 at the Greenfield Community College. Thirty schools are participating in Massachusetts this year.

It was noted that there would likely be a request for smolts to test the Fifteen Mile Falls smolt sampler in the spring.

Attendance

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Caleb Slater	MDFW
Steve Roy	USFS
Bob Stira	NGS
Jon Truebe	Lakeside Engineering
Alia Hinds	UMASS
Dan Marchant	RRSFH
Jason Johnson	RRSFH
Mickey Novak	RCNSS
Alex Haro	USGS – Conte Lab